

## **I was in the Upside-Down Too by InsominiacArrest**

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**Summary:**

Barb left Hawkins Indiana for the city after the incident with the demogorgon, two years later Nancy visits her and they reconnect

# **I was in the Upside-Down Too**

## **Author's Note:**

Barb lives, but leaves the town anyway at the same time in the episodes

Nancy had never really identified with the city. It wasn't the noise of 7 million people breathing together, or the scent of something rotting or growing or sweating, it was just faceless. Like it didn't know you and it didn't want to know you.

When Nancy walked three blocks after parking near the police station (which she figured was a safe spot) she holds her breath.

The street were narrow, nothing liked the unpaved dirt of Hawkins rickety roads. The cars on the road all looked like hers, old and used, but the dents seem wrong, the world a little off kilter as she approaches the tall apartment building.

She stares at the front door without blinking, hands in her pockets and her nerves frayed wires about to spark at any moment.

She realizes that there was no speaker system to ring her in, so she just walks right in, ascending the four flights of stairs in her heels and greeted by the burnt scent of the stairwell. She finds room 412 at the end of the hall and gets a stare from an old Chinese man that lived in 411 as he leaves his apartment to walk his small schnauzer.

She wonders why she wore her best heels, why she put on makeup, why she tried on different outfits for this. She was the one that left her.

She knocks on the door in three rapid beats.

The response doesn't come instantly and in that gap Nancy almost clenches her jaw to the point of aching.

The knob twists before she can turn around, a red-headed surly 20 year old greets her, the smile is genuine, "Nancy Wheeler."

Nancy nods and hugs her coat closer to her, “Barb.” *Don’t tear up* .

She steps aside, “come in.”

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Nancy kept glancing at her, her glasses were somehow larger but more natural on her face, her hair was cropped close to her head and the same high-wasted slacks graced her hips.

It tasted the same, but like it had been worn by time and framed in a whole new lens.

Barb put on coffee for them and presented some angel food cake to her.

“It’s a little stale but it’s still pretty fluffy- best bakery in Queens they call themselves.” Barb snorts and then cuts a piece for herself. “Eat.” She gestures.

Nancy doesn’t want to eat, Nancy wants to itch at her skin until it peels off. She takes a deep breath and smiles, “how have you been?”

Barb shrugs. “You know.” She gives a half smile, “single lady without a high school degree in the big city.”

Nancy looks down at her hands, bending her neck down in the process, “you were good at school, I’m sure you could go back.”

Barb shakes her head as her brown eyes seem to trace Nancy’s features. “Nah. Not yet at least.”

“Where do you work?” Barb takes off the coffee pot and pours them into two mismatched mugs.

“Diner. Waitress.” She says bluntly and then glances up at Nancy through her lashes. “You?”

Nancy tries to smile, “college. But I work at the bookstore on the side.” A silence hangs between them like ripe fruit ready to fall to earth.

Barb brings the drinks over and they sit around a living room made of arm chairs that sink too deep and feels like Barb, Barb, Barb. Quilted and patterned, she always did have good taste.

Nancy looks at her hands, “from your mom.” She gulps and gets out a care package. “For you.”

Barb nods and takes it in her slim hands, “she sends me these once a month after I called her.” Barb smiles and Nancy knows she has to say it.

She opens her mouth and then closes it, Barb reaches for something and brushes up against Nancy’s hand, she jumps.

“So.” Barb glances up, her mouth a hard line but joking. “That monster still running around Hawkins?”

There it was, Nancy’s breath hitches. “No.” She says too loud, “I killed it.” She doesn’t know why she says “I,” why would she say I. “We killed it.”

Barb gives her an easy, graceful smile, “of course you did Nancy Wheeler.” It wasn’t mocking. “If anyone was going to take that thing out...” Barb reached into her jacket and brought out a cigarette. “Well, I wouldn’t doubt it.”

Nancy bites her lip and shifts from side to side, “you could have come back. Could, still, now.” She says with a thorn under tongue that pricked the inside of her mouth.

Barb shakes her head and puts the cigarette between her lips, “There were a few other reasons to leave Nancy.”

*Was I one?* Nancy can’t say that out loud.

“Don’t worry.” Barb touches her hand gently, “I’ll consider coming back for Christmas.” Barb takes a deep breath and lights her cigarette,

“it was just time to leave then.” Barb chuckles to herself, “plus there a faceless government monster running around. So there’s that.”

Nancy joins her in a light little laugh. “Well, that was a point.”

They share a small grin. “So,” Barb leans back, “you have to actually tell me how you handled Mr. Henderson without me.”

Nanc nods and almost starts crying.

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### *The Second Day*

Nancy stayed on her couch that night and woke in the morning to singing, Barb sang while she cooked, soft and illegible to anyone else, it was habit like her mothers.

They lay around all day on Barb’s day off, reclining across the sunlit floor and talking.

Barb pressed a cigarette against Nancy’s lips and held for her as she puffed in a deep breath.

“So,” Barb smiled, “you are with Jonathon now.” It was a teasing tone.

Nancy shrugs, “sometimes. We fight, it’s bad, and then sometimes it gets good again.” Nancy wrinkles her nose, “I keep expecting him to stop ‘hating people’ but.” She takes a deep breath and turns over on the floor to breath in a another puff of smoke.

Barb’s heat makes her feel a little dizzy. “Nanc, you can’t fix everyone. You *were* always like that.” Barb says knowingly and Nancy scowls.

“Steve still writes me too.” She smirks, Barb frowns deeply. “Sappy love poems he thinks are true art. It’s kind of cute.”

Barb sucks on her cigarette and blows it out slowly, little puffs that almost form circles. "I stand by my original thoughts. Steve is a jackass."

Nancy laughs until she can't feel her face, "okay." She shakes and covers her mouth as she laughs, "but he got better."

Barb stretches out and sighs, "you were always too good for all them Nanc. They need moms, not girls that kill monsters." She winked at her and Nancy could barely swallow her own spit.

"It's good to see you." She whispers.

Barb looks away and Nancy reaches out and parts a strand of hair away from her face.

They go out to dinner and Barb shows her the city piece by piece, an ache intensifies in Nancy's gut.

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The night was long and the sirens outside put Nancy on a knife's edge. It's only when the outdoor shouting and fireworks or gunshots lull does Nancy hear the soft sound of little sad hiccups.

Nancy gets up and picks her way over to the semi-open door, she feels like a little girl again, seeking out her friend to tell her new crush or the fact her mom didn't love her dad.

Slight sobs shake the figure in the bed, covering her face and Nancy can feel a pang of pain in her chest.

She comes to the edge of the bed. "Barb?"

Barb looks up with tears in her eyes, "I missed you." She croaks. Nancy nudges her and Barb scoots over, she climbs into the twin bed

with her tentatively. They pull the covers up and face each other.

"I wished you hadn't left." Nancy says with a swollen throat, "I was scared for you."

Barb sighs heavily and reaches for Nanc in the dark. "I had to. The monster, the, what were you calling it? The upsidedown. It wanted me, I knew it, I had to run."

"How do you know that?"

Barb smirked, "and my mom found out. Or she was guessing at least." Barb hiccuped a laugh, or maybe it was a sob. "She kept putting men's magazines on my bed, and saying 'oh Barb, don't you think he's cute?.'"

Nancy laughs and feels something she always knew bubble up, "she *did* always put mints in my bag when she thought my breath was bad. She was like that."

They laugh and Nancy reaches for her friends hand, Barb flinches but interlocks their fingers under the covers.

"Okay." Barb took a deep breath. "Tell me how you killed the damn monster."

"With a baseball bat and fire." Barb laughs again and Nancy repeats to her the harrowing tale, and the end: the little girl that apparently took it apart piece by piece.

"A little girl?" Barb asks slowly.

She nods, "She was psychic or something. Mike's little girlfriend he says."

"Poor thing." Barb whispers and looks down at Nancy's neck, a little shiver crawls down her spine. "But what was it? Where...was I?"

There it was.

"I don't know." Nancy says truthfully. They let the words flow easily, describing the monster, the eerie breathless other world that ate its inhabitants.

Nanc was rubbing her eyes when they got to it's faceless jaws and huge gaping maw. They could have died.

Barb drew closer to her, "I couldn't live with that."

Nancy took even breaths as she watched her red lips in the dark. "We would have gotten you. We could have killed it all together."

Barb is quiet and a sharp yellow light breaths through the open window and Nancy feels calmer.

"I missed you." Nanc announces and it appears to hurt Barb as she draws back. She sits up and wraps her arms around her legs.

"You wouldn't." Barb's voice strained, "Nanc...I. I was following you like a dog- I didn't have to go to the party. I was just a shadow."

Nancy sat up next to her and touched her shoulder tentatively, "I was insistent! I put you through that that, God, Barb I was an idiot."

"You were an idiot." They laugh again and help each other up.

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### *The Third Day*

They sing while they cook, dinner on Nance's last night. " She was more like a beauty queen from a movie scene I said don't mind, but what do you mean, I am the one."

They shimmy back and forth and Nancy laughs as Barb taps her on the nose with the mash potatoes.

"Who will dance on the floor in the round, She said I am the one, who will dance on the floor in the round." They lean in and sing together, touching Barb's arm and belting out the lyrics as loud as she



could. No one cared in the faceless city how much noise she made and Nancy was far enough away from home.

“She told me her name was Billie Jean, as she caused a scene. Then every head turned with eyes that dreamed of being the one. Who will dance on the floor in the round.”

Barb takes her hands and swings her around, she smirks at her, “Billie Jean.” She repeats and Nanc knows it’s directed at her.

“People always told me be careful of what you do, And don't go around breaking young girls' hearts.” Nancy sings by herself and threads her fingers through her hair.

Barb places the spoon down and sniffs, leaning in very close to her, “too late.” She didn’t sing that part.

Nancy’s heart speeds up like a horse in a race with a car engine, “Maybe I could fix that.”

Barb lets her go, and continues stir the lumpy mash potatoes. “Don’t tease me.” She says quietly and Nanc feels all the months she knew Barb was watching her catch up to her.

She swallows and wraps her arms around her waist, “Billy Jean is not my lover.” She sings along to the radio, and then takes another deep breath. “I’m sorry.”

Barb turns around with her hands still pressed against her sides, Barb smiles at her and then pushes her glasses up, she presses their foreheads together, “Billy Jean is not my lover.” She sings the last lines of the song as thhe silly crooning of the static fills the air.

“I’m sorry too.” Barb sniffs, “I know I left when that thing showed up...and other things.”

Nancy pets her hair, “I would have supported you.”

Barb tries to turns away again, “Right, Nanc.”

“You know.” She whispers, “I was in the upsidedown too.”

"What's that mean?" Barb asks quickly, but Nanc already felt magnetized, drawn in.

She kissed her before she knew what she was doing. Barb froze at first, silent and soft like an ocean at low tide. Then she tilted her head and arms wandered to wind around her neck and pull her closer.

They kiss like the years were seconds and maybe they had been too distracted that whole time, until this moment. It was warm and filled her with a bright sensation of sunshine beaming from the inside out.

Sparks under her tongue, and the mash potatoes besides them burned.

They laugh at the dinner table at the burnt food and play footsie under the table.

Nancy has to leave in the morning, but it's kiss instead of a hug and Nancy promises to write, to call, to do something. Barb says maybe this time she can come back- visit for Christmas. See where they can go from there.

**Author's Note:**

anyone hear about the theory the upsidedown is a metaphor for the closet? That one fucked me up